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Hi Harold,

I talked last week with both Nick Cozzarelli and David Lipman about the contentious issue surrounding PNAS's possible engagement with Ebiomed: Should published material that is accessible through Ebiomed be distributed directly by the Ebiomed site and its mirrors, or can it instead be provided indirectly by directing readers to freely-available material at sites maintained by individual journals (as Nick/PNAS proposes)?

I think Ebiomed (or "Ebiosci") should keep its role as a free public library as clear and simple as possible - to receive, archive, organize and distribute scientific information.

Thus, if PNAS chooses to provide the reports it publishes for distribution by Ebiomed, (even if only several months after initial publication), this would be entirely consistent with the intended role of Ebiomed. If PNAS instead wants to make its back issues freely available through its own or HighWire's website, but does not want to transfer the material itself to the Ebiomed repository (kind of like Barnes and Noble refusing to allow its books to be distributed at public libraries, but instead offering to let readers read them for free at its bookstores), then there would be no need, and no good reason, for Ebiomed to enter into a special arrangement with PNAS. PNAS can do what Nick apparently wants it to do, providing the reading public with (delayed) free access to PNAS contents, without any special arrangement with Ebiomed. Pubmed as currently configured, would provide that access directly (as it already does for some journals), without requiring any further special arrangements. In addition to being unnecessary, the arrangement that PNAS proposes would create further confusion as to whether Ebiomed has much to contribute beyond what the journals are already doing (why create a system just to provide pointers to free materials at journal websites?). The hybrid arrangement that Nick is proposing, in addition to further confusing the scientific community as to the role of Ebiomed, would invite other journals and publishers to negotiate their own special arrangements for their relationship with Ebiomed.

Let's make Ebiomed as good as possible on its own terms, and let's keep it simple. The more complicated its role and the more customized or cozy its interactions with existing publishers, the greater the possibility for confusion and misunderstanding, and the more potential targets for criticism and political attacks to block or impede progress.

It would be no great loss to Ebiomed if PNAS were to wind up choosing to make no formal commitment to Ebiomed. They can go ahead with free, delayed release at their own site, reachable from Pubmed. So the potential readers will not be denied. And as long as scientists as authors have even a few "respectable" routes to publication in Ebiomed, (and it's clear already that the Current Science folks will provide these) they can vote with their feet. My guess is that the first few respectable journal-like routes to direct publication in Ebiomed will be deluged with submissions. This in turn, will make it desirable for journals like PNAS to offer this same value to their authors.

So rather than compromising to get journals like PNAS to participate in Ebiomed on their own special terms, the main effort should be directed to encouraging old or new journals or new kinds of publications (like Current Science's nascent Genome Biology) that are completely committed to using the full potential of Ebiomed. Once a few of those are available to authors and readers, Ebiomed's success will be assured, and "market forces" will bring reluctant journals around.

Best regards,

Pat

PS: Still waiting to hear from Jien-Ming Li. We're ready to go on this end if he want's to send some RNA.

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